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AUTHOR Brown, M. Christopher, II
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ABSTRACT

The question before educators responsible for preparing the new generation of global citizens is how to translate the principles of social justice into effective practice. In school settings around the United States, educators endeavor to inform learners of the impact and import of social justice. The question remains, however, how social justice should be practiced. It has been argued that educators have not done the work necessary to define social justice adequately or to develop standards for practice. In fact, the principle of social justice that educators intend to assess by standards has not been developed. It is not certain whether such standards can be developed, but it is clear that the work required to make social justice a practiced principle can be done. (SLD)

**A Principle in Search of a Practice:
On Developing Guidelines/Standards to Evaluate Social Justice**

Paper presented at American Education Research Association (April 3, 2002) by:

M. Christopher Brown II, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Education & Senior Research Associate
Center for the Study of Higher Education
The Pennsylvania State University
400 Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
mcb161@psu.edu

814-863-6759 Office
814-865-3638 Fax

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A Principle in Search of a Practice: On Developing Guidelines/Standards to Evaluate Social Justice

The dawning of the twenty-first century is fraught with both opportunities and challenges for persons committed to social justice. Opportunities abound as many throughout the nation become consciously engaged in facilitating society's role in ensuring "liberty and justice for all". America's identity is linked to equity, opportunity, equality, access, and uplift (Szumski et al, 1984). Concomitantly, the challenges of moving beyond non-active compliance, per forma political correctness, and the now acceptable (sic) toleration with preferment remain. The question before educators responsible for preparing a new generation of global citizens is 'How do we translate the principles of social justice into effective practice?'

PRINCIPLE AND/OR PRACTICE

The Latin root of social justice is "socius justitia", meaning ally for fairness. Hence social justice is the space where individual agree to partner together in adhering to impartial and equitable human intercourses, behavior, and exchanges. Social justice has as its aim the end goal of enriching the human civilization through individual human interactions. In his seminal piece titled "Social justice: What it is and why it matters", Hugo Adam Bedau (1982) writes that there are "needs that any normal human being can be said to have. These needs are, of course, not easily specified with any precision independently of the social conditions in which they arise. . . . It is inevitable, therefore, that a concern for the proper satisfaction of human needs will become a theory of a just society, of just social institutions, and thus a theory of social justice" (p. 86).

The principle purpose of social justice is relatively clear. There is consensus around its functions a fair and just code of demeanor. However, there are multiple and shifting nuances to who or what is included, when, on whose authority, and to what degree. Despite the ideological quagmire surrounding the intricacies of whether social justice applies in the same way to an extremely wealthy, white male chief executive officer of a multinational corporation (read: ENRON) as it does to a formally convicted, paraplegic, Native American, lesbian telemarketer. The principle of social justice clearly endorses the humanity of everyone irrespective of social status, position, class, or caste.

In school settings around the nation, educators endeavor to inform learners of the import and impact of social justice. There is class content, guest speakers, and multimedia representations demonstrating the principle of social justice. Further, students are not only informed of the principle of social justice, they are encouraged to “practice random acts of kindness” and “pay it forward”. These involvements are a de facto acknowledgement of the complex and social nature of the academic curriculum. Pinar and Associates (1996) inform us that

curriculum is intensely historical, political, racial, gendered, phenomenological, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological, and international. Curriculum becomes the site on which the generations struggle to define themselves and the world. . . . Curriculum is an extraordinarily complicated conversation. Curriculum as institutional text is a formalized and abstract version of conversation, a term we usually use to refer to those open-ended, highly personal, and interest-driven events in which persons encounter each other (pp. 847-848).

As such, the academic curriculum is a prime site not for de facto, but rather formal and intentioned education in the principle of social justice.

The principle of social justice is a beacon and compass for both thought and action. The question is "How do we practice social justice?" What is the prima facie evidence of the manifested principle of social justice. Quite simply, how do we know it when we see it?

In Black sons to mothers: Compliments, critiques, and challenges for cultural workers in education, Brown and Davis (2000) demonstrate how the theoretical principles of cultural work could be translated in to educational practice for African American males and others. In fact, there are many volumes, articles, and models detailing the practice of cultural work in education. Social justice has not been so fortunate. While there is significant discourse on establishing a practiced principle of social justice, there has been scant progress in this endeavor.

It could be argued that the preceding argument regarding who and what social justice references have detracted from time and energy that could be devoted to establishing concrete practice ideas. Educators must indeed move beyond the identified boundaries relating to the principle or denotation of social justice. It is in fact the excessive delineation of concepts, constructs, and conversations around the epistemological, ontological, and axiological functions of social justice that have rendered a practical, practicable, practiced form of social justice absent or amorphously embryonic.

SEARCHING FOR STANDARDS

In a chapter titled "Pedagogical Applications: Immanent Critique, Historicity, and the Politics of Curriculum", Agger (1998) argues that the primary reason most social theories have not been applied is because academics are rewarded for research and theory-building. He suggests that there is no external motivation for developing practiced principled or applied theories. Notwithstanding, does not social justice require educators to engage in this work because of an internal locus of control – an innate desire to see the highest form of dignity for all humanity.

Bogotch (2000) speaks directly to the inability to effect social justice practice. Bogotch synthesizes the difficulty of translating the principle of social justice into practice thusly:

- (1) There can be no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in social and academic discourses;
- (2) The center or unity of any educational reform is so dynamic that it can not hold together for long;
- (3) The results of our work [just and unjust] are always fragile and fleeting; and, therefore,
- (4) All social justice/educational reform efforts must be deliberately and continuously reinvented and critiqued – again and again (p. 10).

Simply stated, Bogotch declares that educators have not done the in-class assignments or the homework require for making meaningful social justice practice. This indictment is critically important to the new search for standards. In effect, it disrupts groupthink and

awakens educators to the inability of standards construction until practice work is complete.

The quest for standards is not surprising. Education in specific and society at-large has become preoccupied with standards. The twenty-first century is an era of assessment, evaluation, outcomes, and high-stakes testing. Social justice standards are the next illogical step in this race toward "1.0" statistical perfection. Social justice cannot be standardized, because it has only begun to practice. In a 350 page book titled, Education and Democracy: Re-imagining Liberal Learning in America, the College Entrance and Examination Board pleads with higher education faculty, researchers, and policy makers to develop new strategies for ensuring civitas in academic settings. The tome is in fact a mandate for a formal strategy to infuse social justice principles into collegiate practice among other interests (Orrill, 1997). This challenge has not yet been met.

Moreover, the endgame of social justice work is one of "constructivism" and not "standards". Hence the question is not what we came to know and how it is demonstrated, but rather what we mean by knowing and the metacognitive development involved in what we know. Or as Catherine Fosnot (1996) writes, "constructivism is a theory about knowledge and learning; it describes both what "knowing " is and how one "comes to know" (p. ix). Although the principles of cultural work in education, multicultural curricular construction, and learning styles pedagogy have all reached a level of standardized assessment, they have each also engaged in the requisite demonstration of principle followed by practice before reaching standards.

The question is not should we or should we not have standards. The question is "Have we fully developed the practiced principle of social justice that we intend to assess by standards?" Educators must answer "No" to this query. There is no clear consensus regarding what portions of social justice are most important (if they can be disaggregated), much less what are the best measures to evaluate them (considering that true social justice learning may defy external observation). The search for standards is elusive due to the lack of landmarks provided by proven social justice practice.

Commencement

It is not appropriate to finitely conclude this conversation with the answer "No". Educators must commence to the work of practicing the principle of social justice. If the question is "Can we develop standards to evaluate social justice", the answer is "Not sure". If the next question is "Can we do the work required to make social justice a practiced principle", then the answer is "Yes, we can".

The intellectual journey to this place has been rewarding, but the end is not yet. Michael Apple (1995) closes Education and Power, pondering the likelihood of translating the theories of educational empowerment into practice. He writes, "What then are the possibilities of success? Here we need to be most honest. We simply cannot know" (p. 159). We cannot know where practiced social justice will lead us. But we do know we will be farther along the road of civilized humanity than we are.

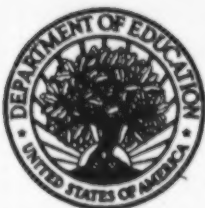
The Declaration of Social Justice in Education

When in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for Social Justice Allies to educate their Compeers on the systems of Oppression, Hegemony, and Incivility that is disrupted to social order, and the assume the Responsibility for Emancipatory and Empowering Education to which the doctrines and principles of Human Life entitle all, an indefatigable Fortitude is required, as to enable them to declare the principles of social justice through the visible demonstration of their Words and Deeds.

We hold these Truths to be socially-relevant, that all People have equal capacity, that they are physically, cognitively, and affectively endowed through their Isness with the desire for certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Justice, Knowledge, and the Pursuit of Humanity —That to secure these Rights, Educators are empowered to affect Change, deriving their untiring Efforts from the Needs of those to be Empowered, that whenever any Form of Social Behavior becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Responsibility of all Educators to resist or dismantle it, and to promote new Socially Just forms of Education and Pedagogy, laying its Core Values on the Principles of Social and Environmental Justice, and organizing their Endeavors in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect Justice, Knowledge, and Humanity of All.

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